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Heroin Traffic Examined

THE POLITICS OF HEROIN
IN SOUTHEAST ASIA. By
Alfred W. McCoy, Harper &
Row, \$10.95).

Heroin didn't always have a bad name. Around the turn of the century it was hailed as a "miracle drug" and approved by the AMA for general use. In fact, it didn't even have a name until Germany's Bayer chemical combine invented "heroin" as a brand name and put it on the market as a cough medicine.

But this fascinating bit of drug lore is only incidental to the central theme of this devastating book; that because of its commitment to contain communism in Southeast Asia, the U.S. government helped create a generation of junkies.

Southeast Asia's "golden triangle" — where Laos, Thailand and Burma meet — has been an opium-growing area for centuries. But what McCoy and his fellow authors are concerned about is how within the last 20 years the "triangle" has expanded its production until today it accounts for 70 per cent of the world's illicit supply of heroin.

For this the authors hold the United States responsible. They specifically charge that in their clandestine war against the Communists, U.S. agencies, notably the CIA, allied themselves with elements known to be engaged in the drug traffic; ignored and even covered up the ac-

tivities of known drug traffickers, and allowed American military aircraft to be used to transport drugs

The charges are difficult to refute because, in the main, they happen to be true. McCoy has done his homework. Critics may quarrel with some of his facts and dispute many of his judgments, but he convincingly demonstrates, for example, that the G.I. heroin epidemic in South Vietnam could not have happened without the active participation of greedy generals and government officials who owed their jobs to the United States.

U.S. involvement in the drug traffic was, as the authors contend, an "inevitable consequence" of our involvement in Southeast Asia, where opium was a way of life. But it did not become an "American problem" until it touched American lives.

The book is not quite the scholarly work that it pretends to be. It is as much an indictment of the Vietnam war as it is a documentation of the drug traffic. The authors suggest that all will be well if President Nixon is defeated and the United States pulls out of Southeast Asia lock, stock and barrel.

Maybe so. But the sad thing is that the book's chief victims are a handful of dedicated CIA men who went to Southeast Asia to do a job. That job was to fight communism, not reform a society.

—Chicago Daily News

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